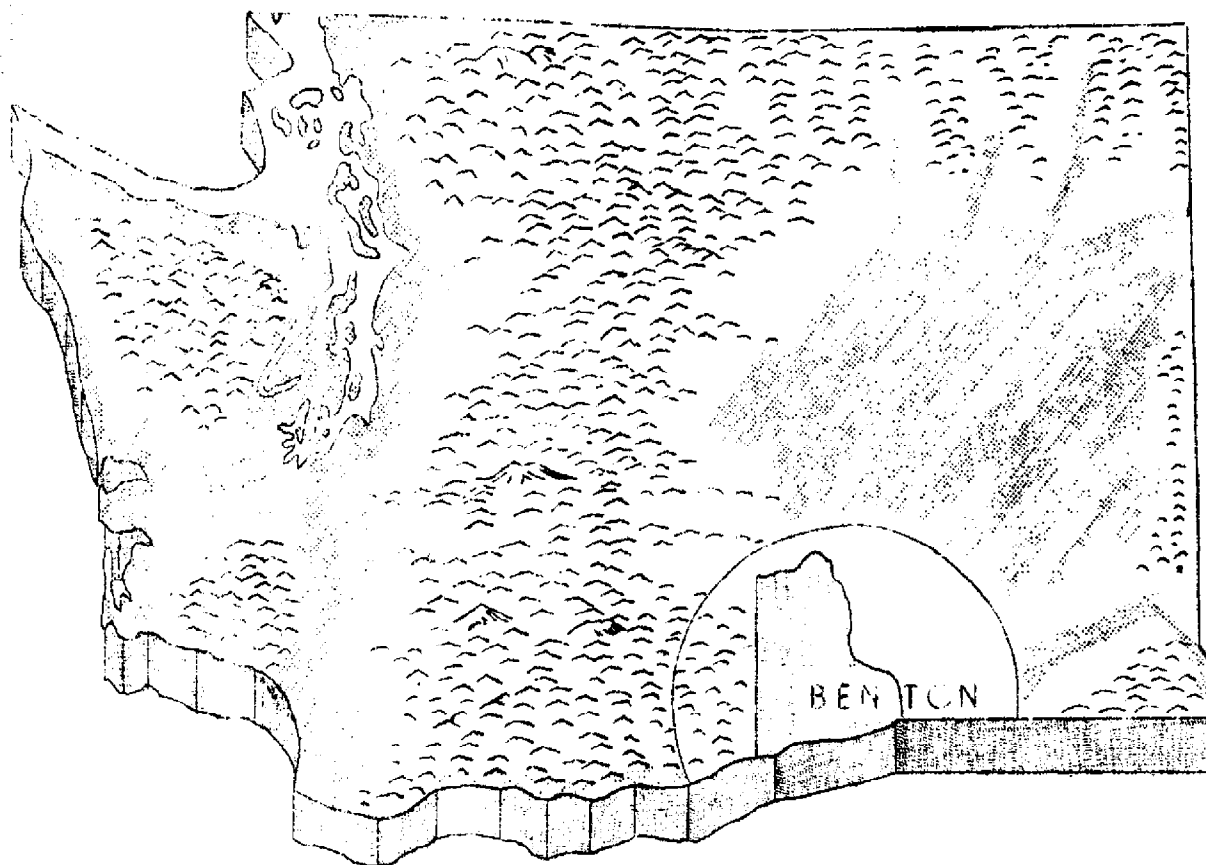


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# BENTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES  
1956



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
J. D. Dwyer, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
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WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE  
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## FORWORD

This book on Benton County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. This project was initiated in 1956 through funds made available by Sverre N. Omdahl, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, 1948-56. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals both in private enterprise and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Benton County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by vocational agriculture and social studies teachers in Benton County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over-all appreciation of Benton County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1910 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Benton County in 1905. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forests which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Lloyd J. Mercer, student in Agricultural Economics, Washington State College and Phillip L. Doctor, Agricultural Statistician, prepared sections on crops, livestock and pattern of agriculture. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Leonard W. Orvold, D. W. Barrowman and Christian A. Stokstad, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service prepared tabular material for the book.

J. D. Dwyer, Director  
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Olympia, Washington  
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## PART I

## History of Benton County Agriculture

Introduction

Benton County, a land of Yakima River Valley plains, Columbia River benchlands and Horse Heaven Hills plateaus, is located in south central Washington. With an area of 1,736 square miles (approximately 1,112,320 acres) Benton is twenty-first in size among the thirty-nine Washington counties. It is slightly larger than the State of Rhode Island in area.

Benton County is primarily industrial with an important agricultural economy of diversified products, including irrigated fruits and vegetables, dryland grains, livestock and poultry. The Atomic Age brought great changes to Benton County in recent years. A large area of its land was acquired in connection with the Hanford Works of the United States Atomic Energy Commission during the 1940's. Thousands of new laborers arrived. Within a few years the economy became more industrial than agricultural. Under this impact Benton County population grew to 63,600 by 1955, gaining five-fold over its 1940 population of 12,053. The influx of industrial and other non-farm workers raised Benton County to eighth position in population among Washington counties.

Although now overshadowed by economic activities related to atomic energy, Benton County agriculture has remained important in the state's economy. Over 7,000 acres of irrigated land and a far greater area of dryland and rangeland were acquired by the Atomic Energy Commission and taken out of farming. However, more intensive irrigated agriculture and expanded wheat farming and beef raising has kept Benton County important in agricultural production. In the 1954 Census, gross sales of products from the county's farms during that year were \$15,379,000, ranking twelfth in the state. Benton was fifth in fruits, second in hops, grapes and mint and tenth in commercial vegetables. Cattle and sheep production ranks eleventh. Benton is among the leading state and national counties growing mint, hops, grapes, asparagus, peaches, apricots, cherries and prunes.

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History 1/

Named in honor of Thomas H. Benton, U.S. Senator from Missouri in the 1840's, who was an advocate of far-western development, Benton County was created by the Washington State Legislature March 8, 1905. It was formed from the eastern portions of Yakima and Klickitat Counties, being one of the last three county units established in the state. Prosser, farming center in the lower Yakima Valley, was made county seat. Boundaries were established to include irrigated farming settlements along the lower Yakima and middle Columbia Rivers and a few scattered ranches in the Horse Heaven Hills south of Kennewick and Prosser.

Agriculture of the livestock and vegetable garden type was practiced by the earliest American and British fur traders on the middle Columbia River. In 1818 Donald McKenzie, of the Northwest Fur Company, built Fort Walla Walla at Wallula on the Columbia River between present Benton and Walla Walla Counties. Horses and a few cattle were grazed on the banks of the river--potatoes, corn and wheat were grown in patches near the fort. Wild hay was harvested from the lowlands along the rivers.

The Indians in what is now Benton County were roving bands of Yakima, Walla Walla, Nez Perce and Cayuse tribesmen. They lived by hunting, root and berry gathering and some fishing and often wintered in villages along the Columbia and Yakima Rivers. They learned some rudimentary agriculture from fur traders and missionaries but changed very little from their ancient customs of food gathering during this early period of contact with the white man.

The arid, sagebrush-covered land of the Benton County area attracted no early permanent settlers during the 1830-1855 period. Overland immigrants coming through Fort Walla Walla were enroute to the Willamette Valley and Puget Sound on the coast. Indian hostility and warfare discouraged hopes for settlement over all central and eastern Washington after 1847. Although Great Britain gave up claim to these lands in the Treaty of 1846, the Indian outbreak starting in 1847 with massacre of Marcus Whitman prevented any land settlement in the Yakima Valley area. The U.S. Army proclaimed the area closed to settlement until peace was made with the central Washington Indian nations.

Warfare between the U.S. Army and a powerful confederacy of fourteen eastern Washington tribes led by the Yakimas was brought to a close by the treaty concluded at Fort Walla Walla, June 9, 1855, between Territorial

1/ This historical summary has been derived from five sources:

- (1) Walla Walla Union Bulletin, (Progress Edition) Walla Walla, Washington, February 22, 1953, p. 94.
- (2) Washington State Associations of County Commissioners and Engineers in cooperation with State College of Washington, 1953 Yearbook, Washington Counties (see section on Benton County).
- (3) Richard M. Perry, The Counties of Washington, State of Washington, Secretary of State, Olympia, Washington, mimeographed) 1943.
- (4) J. Grant Hinkle, Washington, The Evergreen State, 1921.
- (5) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State, (American Guide Series) Writers Program, Works Progress Administration, 1941.

Governor Isaac Stevens and the Indian nations. This treaty was finally ratified by Congress March 8, 1859. Tribes of the Yakima Confederacy accepted the terms of the 1855 treaty which established tribal reservations. When the Indians moved to the large Yakima and Colville Reservations, the way was opened for land settlers and livestockmen to establish themselves along the Yakima and Columbia Rivers of central Washington.

The earliest permanent homestead was made along the lower Yakima River near present Richland. John B. Nelson built the first farm cabin in 1863 at the mouth of the Yakima. He was followed by Smith Barnum and the following pioneer farm families who settled the lower Yakima: the McNeils, Souths, McAlpines and Robinsons. Individuals settling here also included B.G. Grosscup, Joe Banter, Jack Roberts and Dr. Cantonwine. By 1878 there were four cattlemen settled in the valley: Mr. King, Jordie Williams, Fred Rolan and A. Duncan.

A military road and trail followed the Yakima River from Fort Walla Walla to Puget Sound by way of Naches Pass in the Cascades. Westbound immigrants came over this trail more and more frequently after 1870. Some of these overland pioneers sought homesteads along the Yakima River and in the Horse Heaven Hills.

In the 1880's Northern Pacific Railway construction advanced into the lower Yakima Valley, bringing more population. Farm settlers worked on railroad construction and sold beef, grain and hay from their farms to the railroad camps. In 1883 Colonel W. Prosser arrived and platted the townsite of Prosser on the railroad line. Kennewick was established as another important railway point. In the 1880's a few pioneer families moved into the Horse Heaven Hills plateau and started wheat farming. These early wheat growers were Solomon Webber, Nat Travis, H.A. Smith and Bill Badger.

From the beginning, irrigation was vitally needed to make farming successful in the arid lands of present Benton County. Early leaders and promoters of privately owned irrigated districts were Dr. C.A. Cantonwine, B. S. Grosscup, Nelson Rich and Judge Cornelius Hanford. As a result of their pioneer work in the 1880's and 90's two private irrigation companies brought 20,000 acres under irrigation along the lower Yakima River.

By 1900 the river settlements of Kennewick, Kiona, Hanford, Benton City and Prosser and their outlying farming settlements had gained sufficient population to justify petition for a new county. A major reason was to have a courthouse nearer than Yakima or Goldendale both of which were about two days journey away by wagon. In 1905 these Columbia River settlements were separated from the jurisdiction of Yakima and Klickitat Counties. The first U.S. Census of the new county in 1910 enumerated a population of 7,937.

The period 1896-1915 was primarily one of dryland wheat farming and livestock raising. Diversified irrigated fruit, vegetable and forage crop farming expanded at a moderate rate. With limited processing facilities plants in the local area and being somewhat distant from major cities, production of perishable fruits and vegetables was not great. During this time, major cash crops were wheat and corn shipped by boat or rail down the Columbia River. A large amount of grain and hay was grown for livestock. Cattle, sheep and horses were

raised for sale at Walla Walla and Portland, Oregon. Many wild horses, called cayuses, were rounded up in the Horse Heaven Hills for slaughter and live sale.

A development of great significance was the beginning of U.S. Government activity in irrigation under the Reclamation Act of 1902. The Bureau of Reclamation began a large development of the Yakima River Basin in 1905 which was to bring over 300,000 acres under irrigation in Yakima and Benton Counties. This master development of the entire lower Yakima Valley is known as the Yakima Project.

The lower Yakima Valley was developed between 1910 and 1955, bringing water to 48,850 acres located within Benton County. The Kennewick Highlands Division was developed from the older private works of the Hanford Irrigation and Power Company. By 1939 the Kennewick area had 3,325 acres of irrigated cropland. In 1907 the Bureau of Reclamation started expanding the older privately owned Sunnyside Irrigation Works in Yakima County. The Sunnyside Division included 82,158 acres of irrigated land by 1939. The main canal extended to near Benton City along the north side of the Yakima River, irrigating a wide benchland across the river from Prosser. In 1935 the Roza Canal and Roza Division was started in the lower Yakima Valley. Completed in 1948, the Roza Division included a large acreage in the Prosser area. By 1950 the Sunnyside and Roza Divisions had added 45,000 acres of irrigated cropland to Benton County. A newer project consisting of a higher canal called the Main Kennewick Canal was started after 1950 which will add more irrigated land to the Kennewick Highlands Division.

In 1943 the Hanford Atomic Works was started in war-time secrecy. Over 291,000 acres of land were acquired in Benton County for an atomic energy reservation. Thousands of laborers were recruited from all sections of the nation and moved into large war housing projects. A completely new city, Richland, was built to house and serve the new population. A new urban market area, called the tri-cities (Pasco, Richland, Kennewick), nearly half as large as Spokane, encouraged further farm specialization in dairying, poultry raising and horticultural specialties.

The agricultural development of Benton County has been guided and encouraged by a number of farm groups, individual leaders and government agencies. Private groups contributing to this development have included the Washington State Horticultural Association, Washington Fruit Commission and the Benton County Cattlemen's Association.

Technical guidance in irrigation, dryland farming, horticulture and animal husbandry have been provided by various public agencies. These include the Soil Conservation Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Washington State College Irrigation Experiment Station at Prosser, the Tree Fruit Experiment Station at Wenatchee and the Dryland Experiment Station at Lind. Guidance in many aspects of agriculture has been provided by the Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the State College of Washington through the County Extension Agent's staff at Prosser.